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ABSTRACT

In response to renewed interest in undergraduate instruction and to the undergraduate's participation in a humanistic revolt against depersonalization and "scientism," a new educational psychology course has been instituted at Cornell. The 100 to 150 students of varying purposes and interests who enroll in the course are not a coherent group preparing to teach. By placing responsibility for the course with students the following procedures have been worked out. General goals, as viewed by the instructor are presented to the students. Weekly lectures are scheduled to provide continuity. Textbooks, readings, and journals are recommended for student selection. Group discussions among students with common interests are suggested. Student performance and grades are judged on the merits of project activities, some highly directed others open-ended, which make up the student's file. Scheduling of projects, interviews, and exams is up to the student. Modifications of the program have included formalizing such activities as discussion groups and project schedules. Students do not complain about grades, work quality has improved, lecture attendance is good, and incompletes are high but not subject to criticism. (JH)

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TEACHING OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY 1973: FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

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Anyone who teaches in an institution of higher learning is aware of a renewed interest in the "improvement of undergraduate instruction." Students everywhere have become increasingly active in their quest for "relevance" from courses. This increased student activism has led to considerable concern for the nature, organization, and operation of instructional programs.

Undergraduate courses in educational psychology are not immune from this concern. Indeed, a well-attended symposium at the 1970 convention of the American Educational Research Association was titled "The Crisis of Content in Educational Psychology Courses" (Educational Psychologist, 1970). The AERA symposium was followed up by another one at the 1970 convention of the American Psychological Association entitled "Innovative Content and Method for the Educational Psychology Course." Two symposia concerned with teaching educational psychology and a presession on innovative approaches to teaching educational psychology were scheduled for the 1971 convention of the American Psychological Association. The 1972 convention showed a similar, continuing concern for the teaching of educational psychology.

Division 15 (Educational Psychology) of APA has increased its attention to the teaching of educational psychology as is evidenced by the establishment of an ad hoc committee. Also, six recent issues of the Educational Psychologist (Division 15 newsletter) have been focused on teaching educational psychology. Activities are underway to form a special interest group on the teaching of educational psychology in AERA. The APA Council of Representatives has added organizational import to the concern through its statement on "psychology in the educational venture" as follows:

> Further, APA should take official steps to reaffirm its belief that the role of the teacher is a crucial and significant one in society, such steps to include systematic efforts to support and improve teacher education in general (American Psychologist, 1971).

Many more examples could be cited to illustrate the widespread attention currently being given to teaching educational psychology including the Winter, 1971 issue of the Journal of Teacher Education. But enough! The teaching of educational psychology has center stage.

Now, an interesting situation is developing with regard to the relationship between the nature of college undergraduates today (particularly those in teacher education programs) and trends within educational psychology. This is the way I put it in a recent issue of the Educational Psychologist.

> It is becoming increasingly apparent that this is a very difficult course (educational psychology) to teach...and most of us are not doing it well. There is a kind of humanistic revolt among college undergraduates against depersonalization and "scientism" in our culture. This is a fairly pervasive phenomenon and holds true particularly for education. There is, at the same time, a growing trend within educational psychology to make it more "scientific." This is reflected in most texts and journals. These two trends are on a collision course. Graduate students find it reasonably easy to resolve this dilemma. They are, after all, in the process of becoming "behavioral scientists" -- at least most of them are. But for undergraduates and graduate students just entering the field to prepare for teaching, the dilemma poses a more difficult problem. Almost unanimously they are motivated to enter teaching from a different value posture; one that is quite incompatible with the "scientific approach to the study of education." As a consequence, they affectively (if not cognitively) reject much of what they are invited to study. And the form of the invitation is also important. We must come to grips with the question of how to give more cognizance to the human values in educational psychology without detracting from its scientific aspects (Ripple, 1970).

After ten years of teaching educational psychology to undergraduates at Cornell University with minor variations in procedure from year to year, in 1970 I decided to make a rather dramatic change in an attempt to "come to grips with the question." Innovative? Well, at least it was vastly different from what I had been doing. Let me describe the situation in which I teach. It is in the main, I think, not an atypical situation. But there are variables I do not have control over. These variables limited me in some ways.

The course I offer is in the Department of Education. the department enrolls no undergraduates, save in scierce education and agricultural education. It provides for no cohesive undergraduate teacher education program. No methods courses and no student teaching are provided. But it does offer the foundations courses in partial fulfillment of state certification for teaching. The educational psychology course is for three credits. It has an enrollment of approximately 100 to 150 students.

The students are an admixture in terms of interest and reasons for taking the course. They are enrolled in different subject matter departments in the university. These departments make arrangements for their own methods course and student teaching supervision. There are approximately equal numbers of men and women. Some students are taking the course because they are certain they want to become a teacher (at levels varying from nursery school to college teaching). Of these, some are resentful of having to take the course, while others are eager to take it despite the fact that it is "required" for certification. Some students are taking the course (for reasons of their own) but have no intention to teach. Most students are undecided. They "might" want to teach but they're uncertain. These students are taking the course "just in case" and to help them make up their minds. There is one teaching assistant provided by the department.

These are some of the variables defining the situation and imposing some limitations. It could be argued that efforts should be made in the direction of changing some of these variables, and so they are. It is certainly not an optimum, coherent program for the preparation of teachers! But it is a reality and not atypical, in significant ways, of the content in which courses in educational psychology are offered elsewhere.

Under these kinds of conditions, the typical course procedure is for the instructor to give two lectures per week with the third hour spent in smaller group discussion sections. A textbook is assigned, perhaps a book of readings, and reading materials on reserve in the library. Students are assigned one or more term papers. There is usually a midterm and a final examination at the least. Attendance is mandatory. Students are generally encouraged to have a

conference with the instructor only if they are not doing well. Grading is on a "curve."

Given the conditions described, I would submit that this is not an unreasonble set of procedures to follow for an instructor (who also must do research, publish, serve on faculty committees, work with graduate students, etc.). Some instructors can make such procedures work. Most can't. It is, in part, these kinds of procedures (in educational psychology or any other course) that are anathema to students in their quest for meaning, humanness, and "relevance." Rather than education in a sense of inquiry, these procedures are at best an exercise in anxious entertainment (with a charismatic instructor) and at worst an exercise in "batch processing." It is difficult for the instructor to avoid an exaggerated role of evaluator and academic policement.

Assuming that the budgetary and staffing plight of most institutions prevent modification of some of these restricting variables (e.g., class size, number of teaching asssitants), what can be done to improve things? They way I attempted to do it involved basically shifting the responsibility for decision-making from myself to the students. Within reasonable limits consistent with the subject matter of the course, students' freedom of choice was expanded considerably. The trick was to accomplish this while maintaining the intellectual integrity of the subject matter and meeting my responsibility to students.

At the first class meeting, students were given a course outline. The outline included a statement of the general goals of the course as seen by the instructor. The course procedures and operations were set forth explicitly. Given the diversity of students in reasons for taking the course, interest, level and subject area interest, etc., the procedures were intended to provide students with an opportunity to direct their own learning activities with guidance from the course.

Although there was no one required textbook, it was recommended that students obtain a current text in educational psychology. Reading the text was encouraged to provide students with a sense of the content and organization of the field, and to serve as a context for the lectures. Of the roughly 40 basic

educational psychology textbooks published during 1960-1970 and still in print (Prakken and Shively, 1969), three were highly recommended (selected by the instructor). In addition, students were urged to read original theory and research articles in educational psychology obtained from journals or books of readings. A recommended list of current books of readings and journals were provided.

Lectures were scheduled for once a week. It was expected that students would attend all lectures...less to take notes and prepare for examinations than to provide for course continuity and direction. A total of 15 lectures were scheduled covering conventional topics in educational psychology from educational objectives to evaluation and measurement. A list of selected references organized according to lecture topics was made available to students. There were no scheduled required examinations. However, any student requesting an examination could be provided with one by the instructor. Regular discussion sections were not scheduled, but groups of students with common interests could request them and have the instructor provide for time, space, and group leader arrangements. It was stated that grades in the course would be assigned on an individual basis judged by the evidence provided by students' project activities.

Project activities were grouped into uniform required project activities and optional categories (of which any three were required). Some were highly directed, others were more open-ended. All were subject to negotiation. That is, if students wanted to replace any required activities with optional ones or substitute activities of their own choice, they were invited to negotiate this with the instructor. Those activities that were open-ended were presented so purposely to provide students with a range of freedom in the service of personal relevance. If students wanted more structure or wanted to discuss ideas about which they were uncertain, they were encouraged to arrange for a conference with the instructor. Some activities had specified deadline dates, others could be turned in whenever the student wished. Because of the number in the class, students were urged to distribute turning in their project activities at reasonable time intervals rather tha submitting them en masse at the end of the course. A final deadline date for acceptance of any project activity was stipulated consistent with the termination

of final examination week in the university. All project activities were kept in folders for individual students. Students had access to these folders to examine the instructor's evaluative reactions to submitted activities. Because students were to be graded individually (not on a "curve") a priori statements of minimum quality standards were not considered appropriate. The students' final grade was a function of the number and quality of project activities in their folder as of the termination of the course.

A list of uniform required project activities was presented. Each project activity had supplementary materials to elaborate on expectations and give direction to student efforts. These activities included taking standardized tests (e.g., Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values) for illustrative purposes, participating in experiments, doing a case study, engaging in tutorial teaching, writing a programed instructional sequence, etc. -- essentially active inquiry into the content of educational psychology. An additional set of project activities was presented in the optional category. These optional activities were either to provide for greater depth (e.g., do a task analysis a la Gagne, The Conditions of Learning, of a subject matter you are interested in) or breadth (e.g., visit an innovative or different or "free" school and describe the experience) of student interest.

The course procedures just described were presented in proposed form with some apprehension at an APA convention symposium in September of 1970. They have been in operation for three years as of this writing. On the basis of this experience, the procedures are most successful. Minor modifications have occurred and are planned for the future, but the basic structure of the procedures remains.

The pacing of individual lectures within a reduced lecture schedule to provide for better continuity is under constant review. Invited speakers on special topics will be arranged for next year on non-lecture days, with student attendance voluntary as a function of their interest in the topic. Initially, the spontaneous discussion sections were a collosal failure. None formed. Apparently the invitation was too nondirective in a large class with little opportunity for spontaneous gatherings of a critical mass of students.

Now, data are gathered on student interests early, and an initial set of group meetings clustered around these interests are arranged. Groups have appointed leaders and are on their own after the first meeting. At the termination of the course, a group synthesis paper is required to summarize the group activities.

It is interesting that no student requested an examination. The number of project activities to evaluate is overwhelming! An appropriately distributed deadline system to facilitate this task is now in operation. Project activities are responded to in written dialogue fashion rather than with individual grading. An overall grade is determined for each student by the instructor and teaching assistant through examining individual student folders at the end of the course. The specific grade is a function of a collaborative evaluative judgment. Procedures were instituted to objectify this collaborative judgment through a point system. Grades are determined by point intervals arrived at through aggregating points for project activities. Grades tend to be higher, but not much. Many more "incompletes" are given, but there are no student complaints about grading -- contrary to experiences in past years.

Students do far more and better quality work than did students under previous procedures. And the feeling-tone of the class is one of healthy enthusiasm. There is far more instructor-student contact for better reasons. Although attendance at lectures is expected, it is not really "necessary." Nevertheless attendance at lectures approximates 80 to 90 percent -- better than in previous years and notable for a large class. Undoubtedly, some students "bag" the course and treat it as "mickey mouse." These are the students who receive incoupletes. There are more of these students than in previous years, but not many -- perhaps as high as 10 percent! It is significant that no disturbing amount of audible criticism has come from students, colleagues, or administrators in regard to the reduced lecture schedule or the elimination of examinations.

The most unfortunate and severe limitation in operating a course under these procedures of greater flexibility and freedom lies in the university context and the structure of other courses that compete for students' time and energy. Perhaps quoting a student reaction (one of many such unsolicited

reactions) captures the spirit of this limitation.

> help! I made it through the course OK...enjoyed the lectures and often considered reading more on the topic -- but didn't. Much as I hate to admit it, if I'm not going to be tested on the stuff, I don't read it -- which I suppose was the purpose of this type of course. I felt bad about just doing the minimum for the course, but not bad enough to do anything about it. If my other courses had been set up like this one, I would have spent more time on this. But others demanded, this one asked my interest. So after dealing with demands, I didn't make time for this type of education which I feel is much better. I wouldn't have wanted the course if it had been taught more conventionally though, because I appreciated the freedom it gave me even though I didn't "use" the course to my best advantage. I think it was such a surprise that I was given responsibility which I usually associate with a teacher. I kept thinking that somewhere along the line this "too good to be true" course is going to fail me -- when actually I feel I failed it!

This student did not fail the course. And I don't think the course failed her.

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